

Indigenous Social Work Field Education: “Melq’ilwiye” Coming Together towards Reconciliation

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Abstract

This article describes a participatory action research project currently unfolding across five university/community sites from British Columbia to South India that is working to reveal, review and reconcile Indigenous social work and human service field education. Subsequent to a research development project identifying culturally safe practices in Aboriginal social work field education (Clark, Drolet, Arnouse, Mathew, Michaud, Walton, Tamburro, Derrick, & Armstrong, 2009) our intersectional research team set out to expand and center this Indigenous knowledge in five diverse university/community sites and begin a reconciliation process between mainstream dominant social work and human service theories, policies or practices that may be harmful for Indigenous students who are doing their field placements. The article considers how field education, and working by example, the researchers and the research project, can create fissures in the dominant normativity of this social work domain. The authors argue for an Indigenous intersectionality framework as an important component of reconciliation within social work field education. One of the goals of this research project is to center indigenous and local knowledges and to begin a reconciliation process within the social work and human service field education programs while maintaining strong commitments to social justice and activism.

Looking in One Direction

Our initial work began with a story offered by a Secwepemc Elder who assisted and guided our participatory action research project as a co-researcher and ethical guide. This story invited us to look back to where we came from, in order to move forward all looking in one direction. In addition, he offered the Secwepemc word "Melq'ilwiye" which means coming together, and has guided our process. This story continues to guide our research as we look back from where we came, reflect on where we are, and now with this new study look forward. Our initial research occurred in the Interior of British Columbia with a community – university partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies from the Interior Indian Friendship Society in Kamloops, Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt, all of which are located on the traditional territories of the Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux peoples. Elders, students and field education faculty and community all offered actions and resistances for the creation of Indigenous social work and human service field education¹.

Themes suggested field education programs be responsive to Indigenous students including spirituality and ceremony as central integration, grief and loss honouring practices, a focus on relational practices, Elder involvement, and adoption of wellness plans for students (Clark et al., 2009, Clark, Drolet, Arnouse, Mathew, Michaud, Walton, Tamburro, Derrick, & Armstrong, 2010). We have taken this exploratory study a step further through a Social Science and Humanities Research Council Aboriginal research grant to collaborate with five diverse university - community sites, on five different Indigenous territories, across one Province, and two countries. This partnership includes Thompson Rivers University (TRU) in Kamloops, BC, the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) in Merritt, BC, the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, BC, the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) in Prince George, BC and Madras Christian College (MCC) in Chennai, South India. Implementations of the recommendations of the original project have begun at TRU and the team is prepared to enrich the learning through

¹ Throughout this article we will use social work but is inclusive of other social work programs including human service programs which prepare students for social work education.

collaborative partnerships. TRU, NVIT, UNBC, UBC, and MCC are further developing the mixed methods to collect the voices specific to their Territory and school. Themes will be compared and shared across Territories. This will serve as opportunity for richer development of reconciliation practices in social work field education, and to begin to identify Indigenous field education practices and processes, locally and internationally.

An Indigenous Intersectional Framework

Being Indigenous, the Indigena are not metaphors. Those of us who are indigenous have experienced the everyday realities of continued colonization, which has shaped the ways in which we think of ourselves, one another and the ‘whitestream’ and the ways in which we write, speak, and come to research. Those of us who are not Indigenous have been profoundly shaped by our witnessing of colonization, by our roles as accomplices, abettors, exploiters, romanticizers, pacifiers, assimilators, includes, forgetters, and democratizers (Fine, Tuck & Zeller-Berkman, 2008, pp. 159-160).

Intersectionality is not new to Indigenous peoples’ it’s the way we have always lived (Yee, J. 2012). Intersectionality has been central for thousands of years in Indigenous and tribal communities. Intersectionality as a theoretical construct was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) and was developed out of the lives of African-American activists to describe the oppression produced structurally and, experienced and resisted individually and collectively through and across diverse social categories of identity simultaneously. There is growing recognition that the concept of intersectionality “complements growing discussions about the complexity and multiplicities involved in being indigenous, in the category of indigeneity, and in indigenous people’s health and well-being” (de Leeuw & Greenwood, 2011, p. 54). This paper argues for an Indigenous intersectionality framework as an important component of reconciliation within social work field education, as it is rooted in a deep awareness of the intersecting structural forces of gendered, raced, classed, ablest, heteronormative colonial oppression, past and present, and situated and developed in the local indigenous community and knowledge. There is a pressing need for research that illuminates the complex structural factors that contribute to experiences for Indigenous students in social

work field education programs including the ongoing effects of the Indian Act, reserve system, residential school system, and child welfare system, while identifying such students' historic and ongoing resistance and activism with respect to healing from this legacy. One of the goals of this research project is to center indigenous and local knowledges to engage in a reconciliation process in social work field education and strengthen social justice and activism. Consistent with Indigenous and intersectional commitments to reflexivity, we have also applied the concept of intersectionality to our research team itself. As developed by Clark and Hunt (2007, 2008) and others an intersectional research team is committed to applying the concept of intersectionality within the team and recognizes that the contextual nature of identity across geography, social and cultural contexts, and time is understood and is integral in the development of a team that is intersectional. Furthermore, as an intersectional research team we are choosing to create a research space that uses all of this knowledge, and purposefully asks what everyone's agenda in doing this work?

In the fall of 2010, the newly expanded research team gathered together for the first time at the Quaaout Lodge, on the Little Shuswap Indian Band in order to build relationships and to strengthen the partnership for the research project. The agenda, while busy with learning, sharing and research development, involved the land and spirit through trips to the salmon run, and a story-telling and sharing session in the Kekuli winter home. Like the Salmon and their journey, we are guided by memories of where we have come from, and a vision of where we need to go. Towards this goal, each member of the team articulated their intentions and aspirations for this project, as Indigenous, Métis, and allied educators, and our respective location and partnerships within the Indigenous territories we reside on. We recognize that our universities, and social work programs, as well as us as research team members have been shaped by complex and diverse historic and contemporary relationships to colonization and to local Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, in considering the goal of centering Indigenous practices in social work, the team recognizes the diversity of Indigenous identity, as many of the team who are Indigenous are living and working as visitors in other territories, while often our Indigenous students are from the territory where the university is situated and have strong cultural practices, and others are visitors in the territory and are learning about their Indigenous territory while attending university. This has underscored

the importance of appreciating the diversity of knowledge from different locations, while centering the learning in the Indigenous territory where the university is situated as highlighted below.

The members of the research team are located on the unceded territory of the Secwepemc people in the Interior of British Columbia through Thompson Rivers University. These include, Mike Arnouse, Elder Secwepemc; Natalie Clark, Field Education Coordinator HUMS programs, Aboriginal ancestry; Jann Derrick Therapist Mohawk, Julie Drolet Field Education Coordinator, BSW programs, French-Canadian, Nadine Mathews, Community-Based Researcher, Vicki Michaud, Community Partner Secwepemc, Paul Tamburro previous TRU faculty, community-based researcher, Abenaki and Shawnee, Patrick Walton, Education faculty, Métis.

Our intentions in doing this research are to continue the journey we began in our initial research project and share and learn from other sites. We envision local action with global commitments to centering Indigenous approaches in field education both within human service programs and social work programs. Some of the action research practices we have implemented at TRU includes Elders in classrooms and field education preparation seminars, cultural safety teachings through a Mohawk elder and community therapist, providing Indigenous faculty field liaisons, developing an Aboriginal and faculty advisory to the school, and providing wellness gatherings for the Indigenous students and their families. One learning is the connection between our work and decolonizing the university space, as many of our students are active on campus, thus we recognize that change in social work and human service field education requires advocating for and being a part of structural changes throughout the University. Examples of actions here include organizing a meeting with the new president of TRU and Aboriginal students.

The University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) is located on Lheidli T'enneh Territory, north of Secwepemc Territory and has regional campuses on the territory of many tribal councils, bands and First Nations. The research team members include Joanna Pierce, Assistant Professor and Field Director, and Susan Burke, Métis, Sessional Instructor and community-based researcher from the School of Social Work.

Located in British Columbia's north, UNBC is situated on the top of Cranbrook Hill. The university opened in 1994, and the campus overlooks the northern community of Prince George. In recognition of the vast northern geographical area, UNBC has Regional Campuses located in South-Central (Quesnel), the Northwest (Terrace), and Peace River-Liard (Fort St. John). The School of Social Work continues to expand across the regions creating demands on rural and remote field placements. This challenge is discussed in the literature by Zapf (2001) who suggests that to deny the existence of the geographic reality of countries with challenging terrain and immense distances between populated areas would ignore the clear emerging distinction between rural and remote areas or regions. Our focus is to examine ways in which we can strengthen current relationships with Indigenous rural and remote communities across the regions to enhance field placement opportunities for students who request practicum opportunities in these challenging geographic areas.

The University of British Columbia's main Vancouver campus is located on the traditional territory of the Musqueam people. The research team members are Grant Charles, Associate Professor, and Richard Vedan, Associate Professor and member of the Neskonalith Band of the Secwepemc First Nations.

The School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia (UBC) is one of the oldest social work programs in Canada having been established in the 1930's. Despite the longevity of the program the School has a mixed history when interacting with Aboriginal communities and students. That is despite the fact that the university is located on unceded territory and borders on the Musqueam First Nations. With a few notable exceptions such as the BSW program we have run in conjunction with Squamish First Nations, we have struggled to serve the Aboriginal community to the extent that we should. This is, in part, a reflection of the larger struggle the university as a whole has had building relationships with Aboriginal communities. Some of this is because of the size of the university but also because of historical attitudes towards reaching out to communities in general and Aboriginal communities in particular. As Richard has said it wasn't that long ago that UBC had more poles on our grounds than we had Aboriginal students in our programs. This is changing but there is still a great deal of work to do before the School and the University can say that

we have developed a culturally safe space for Aboriginal students and the broader Aboriginal community.

We have got involved in this project out of desire to better understand and meet the needs of Aboriginal students in our program as well as to attempt to make the School more attractive in terms of recruitment. Since field education is such a significant part of professional training it seemed a logical place to start. We recognized that in order to make the learning environment safer and more meaningful for Aboriginal students we needed to better understand the dynamics of the process for them as well as the people supervising them and the agencies where they are placed.

Michelle Reid, Field Education Coordinator and faculty member, is a member of the research team from NVIT. My Heiltsuk name is Juba. I am a member of the Heiltsuk Nation and I have bi-cultural heritage. NVIT has two campuses, in Merritt BC on the Nlaka'pamux people's territory and in Burnaby on Coast Salish Territories. I am interested in this research project because I believe that we have to continue to address the strengths and challenges within schools of social work and field education curriculum and programming to ensure that they are inclusive, respectful and validating to Indigenous theories and practices and peoples. This is the beginning of an ongoing conversation in this area of field to assist in changing our programs in meaningful ways. I am a proud auntie of many nieces and nephews who remind me of why I went into social work education and the importance of this work. I am committed to addressing the ongoing colonial impacts to ensure a better present day and future for them and other Aboriginal peoples that is built on equality, respect and social justice.

Miriam Samuel is head of the department of social work at Madras Christian College (MCC) in Tambaram-Chennai in South India. Jean Boddhu is a graduate social work student at MCC. At MCC in India, the mission statement has a strong focus on a rights perspective: Hence the curriculum and training focuses on integrating communities that have been marginalised over the centuries; tribal communities (Adivasis) being one of them. This is also reflected in admissions of students from tribal communities to the course. The department has a strong focus on community development processes that are participatory and rely heavily on the involvement of people in communities. The curriculum has a course

on ‘Tribal & Indigenous Social Work Practice’, and is an effort to facilitate understanding of tribal communities; students are taken on a Tribal Camp, which is part of the course requirement. This develops in them a deep sensitivity to understanding the diversity in culture and needs of the communities. The weeklong camp in a remote tribal village challenges students to consider the ways in which social work can be practiced in these communities. Questions such as who is developed? Who is cultured? What is social work practice among tribals? The camp has questioned the whole gamut of ‘mainstreaming’ and the relevance of indigenous knowledge and health practices and the wealth of traditional ecological knowledge. Who has knowledge? Is knowledge colonized? Do we respect indigenous knowledge in social work practice?

The project considers the diversity of learning from local Indigenous sites, in numerous diverse locations with different colonial histories past and present, in British Columbia and South India, as well as the vast geographic differences, in rural and urban landscapes. A comparative study is possible across these diverse sites, as we value the local context that grounds the research in focusing on “wise practices” (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010) rather than the westernized concept of “best practices.” We will not assume our study can be fully transferred to the multitude of diverse Indigenous contexts (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010) yet share an ongoing concern given the history of social work education at the national and international level.

Reflexivity within research and practice requires us to not only consider our actions; and ourselves but also to challenge the very profession that we have invested time in (Clark, 2012). The history of social work within Canada is rooted in construction of innocence, assuming that the profession is inherently good because of the good intentions of the people working within it and not recognizing the connection to the colonizing traditions of “goodness” and “helpfulness” (Rossiter, 2001). Cindy Blackstock’s (2005) article “The Occasional Evil of Angels” draws attention to the fact that social work as a profession believes so strongly in its ability to do good in society that it does not examine, or reflect, on the “potential to do harm” (p. 1). In spite of a mandate rooted in social justice and advocacy, social workers through history have been directly and indirectly implicated in the multiple harms done to Indigenous children and families. From the

residential school system through to the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their homes during the “sixties scoop” to the current overrepresentation of Aboriginal children within child welfare in BC and Canada. In fact, as Raven Sinclair (2004) notes “social work has negative connotations to many Aboriginal people and is often synonymous with the theft of children, the destruction of families, and the deliberate oppression of Aboriginal communities” (pp. 51-52).

Despite this history, many new social work and human service students identify their reason for entering the profession as “I just want to help people” with little or no awareness of the colonial history of the profession and its link to the oppression of Indigenous people. Furthermore, in spite of the trend towards culturally safe and competent education for Indigenous students and people receiving services, there has been little examination of this within social work education. In the words of BSW graduate, E. Alston-O-Connor (2010), “as agents of child apprehension, social workers must examine their role in this tragedy and in the colonization of Aboriginal peoples. A commitment to implementing culturally relevant social work practice with First Nations clients is essential for the profession” (8).

Within India there is a long tradition of social service, and professional schools of social work date back to 1936. These schools however were chartered by Americans, and reflecting U.S. curriculum (Nimmagadda & Martell, 2008). During the colonial period, the British classified India’s population into categories, one of which was adivasi (indigenous people). Today the tribal peoples of India make up 10-15% of India’s population and have a strong history and tradition including self-regulating economic and political systems and reliance on the forest for daily needs including food, shelter and medicine. However, within social work education the use of local or Indigenous knowledge is often not included, and there is a growing recognition that within countries like India, they have largely not taken advantage of their extraordinarily rich indigenous intellectual and academic tradition (Nimmagadda & Martell, 2008).

In considering the history of colonization and the key role of education in colonization Sandy Grande (2008) challenges, “unless educational reform also happens concurrently with an analysis of colonialism, it is bound to suffocate from the tentacles of imperialism” (p.236). As such we must

consider the university itself as a site of colonial struggle, a microcosm where power relations are enacted, performed and refined. A key step in this process is recognizing and naming the colonialism as it currently exists within education and the discipline of social work. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes "some of these disciplines, however, are more directly implicated in colonialism in that either they have derived their methods and understandings from the colonized world or they have tested their ideas in the colonies"(p. 65). Recognizing and naming the current impacts of colonialism in our programs, and field education specifically, is an important goal for us in this project as we move forward.

Examining the ethical framework of our research as it unfolds also requires we ground ourselves in the sociopolitical context of social work in both Canada and India. The reconciliation of social work theory and practices with Indigenous peoples of Canada is currently in critical dialogue due to the social work profession's historic and ongoing contribution to colonization (Blackstock, 2005; Blackstock, 2006; Fournier & Crey, 1997; MacDonald & MacDonald, 2007; Sinclair, 2004). As Richard Vedan (2009) notes in the foreword to *Wicihitowin: Aboriginal Social Work in Canada*, "... nationwide, there is not a single First Nations family or community that has not been affected by the child welfare practices that resulted in what became known as the "Sixties Scoop", with an exponential increase in the number of children brought into the care of the state" (p. 13). These numbers have not decreased since the 1960's, but in fact in many provinces have continued to increase (Blackstock, 2005). Similarly, within India and more generally throughout the world "the human services have contributed to the practices of colonization and dispossession" (Healy, 2000, p. 61 as cited in Gray, Coates & Yellowbird, 2008, p. 2).

Although some footing has been made through innovative, Indigenous centred curriculum and university safe spaces where social work is transmitted to the next generation of students, contributions in field education remain scarce. As highlighted in stories from our original research development grant (Clark et al., 2009, 2010) the need for field education to be a strong site of Indigenous centered social work theories and practices is necessary. It is the space where curriculum instruction or theory comes together with experiential learning and the identity of a social worker (Westerfelt & Dietz, 2001; Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 2007). It

can also be the location of ongoing racism and the breakdown of change for Indigenous centred practices (Clark et al., 2009, 2010; Razack, 2001; Razack, 2002). In fact, one could argue that field education is the site where colonization continues within social work education in policies, and practices. Michael Hart (2009) in calling for the need for anti-colonialism within social work education cites Graham Smith (2000),

I do not believe for an instant that we are in a postcolonial period. I do not think we have seen the last of colonization; on the contrary, it is very much alive and well. What has happened in recent years is the creation of an illusion that colonization is no longer practiced – that somehow the ‘white’ world now understands this phenomenon and is able to desist from it. This, of course, is a myth. What has happened is that the processes of colonization have been reformed in different and more subtle ways. Many of these new formations are insidious, and many of them have yet to be fully exposed. (p. 29).

Within a global context, concerns over ‘professional imperialism’ continue, as social work has become part of the ongoing colonial project (Midgley, 2008, p. 32). Many scholars have noted that social work has to be concerned with this ongoing colonization through the globalization of social work education, practices and policies and specifically the potential devaluing of localized and indigenous knowledges and systems of helping and healing (Gray, Coates & Yellow Bird, 2008; Hart 2008).

From this intersectional research team, grounded in these Indigenous, multilocated contexts we have been examining Indigenous social work field education using Indigenous research methods. Students and practitioners should not misconstrue the presence of Indigenous perspectives within social work as an indication of either the profession’s commitment to respect the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to be self-determining within the realm of professional social helping or recognition that Indigenous knowledges and practices have equitable status with Euro-western social work theories and methods (Baikie, 2009, p. 45).

An Indigenous intersectional framework together with participatory action research methodology recognizes that research must create “the conditions that are respectful of the multiple readings of the world

hinges on recognizing the limitations of an old order and going beyond the mechanisms that maintain that order” (Ermine et al. 2004:24). The stories from our original research development grant on cultural safety and intersectionality were the beginning steps in exposing the colonial forces at work in field education. As we move forward towards processes of reconciliation within social work and field education specifically, our research aims to do so within an Indigenous intersectional framework.

The Research

Using tools developed in the earlier project, the objectives of this project include: Advancing traditional knowledge of Indigenous field education; honouring the experiences of Indigenous students within field education; critically examining the field education practice and policies within Canada and internationally as the basis for recommendations; implementing indigenous knowledge and perspectives in social work and human service field education; and enhancing and extending relationships among Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, researchers, students and allies as a basis for ongoing research and practice in Indigenous field education.

Some of the important components we are exploring in the project are through an Indigenous intersectional framework, building a reflexive and culturally safe space both within the research team, as highlighted, but most importantly within field education to allow us to move forward with reconciliation and implementation of rights frameworks. Specifically through interviews, talking circles and questionnaires we are beginning to listen to the stories of our students, educators, community partners, and Elders about their experiences in social work field education programs.

Reconciliation is defined as a way to “restore to friendship or harmony” and to “settle and resolve differences” (Retrieved from: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reconciling>). Within Canada the recent Truth and Reconciliation commission has resulted in increased debate and dialogue about the meaning of truth and reconciliation within Canada and between settler and Indigenous peoples. There is recognition that if reconciliation is going to work then a process of promoting self-determination and restoration of languages, cultural and social structures are required. Development of strategies is required across a wide range

of structures including within post-secondary education (Mussell, 2008). Partnerships between First Nations and others are required to make this successful. Cindy Blackstock and her colleagues have applied the phases of reconciliation to child welfare, within their Touchstones of Hope (2006) project. The phases as proposed in the Touchstones of Hope include truth-telling or naming; acknowledging, restoring and relating (Blackstock et al. 2006). This reconciliation model recognizes the impacts of colonization and the ongoing processes that Indigenous are engaged in “to build and develop culturally based services and policies” (Blackstock, et al (2006, p. 2). In this research process we will be considering models towards reconciliation within social work field education within an Indigenous intersectional framework that recognizes the diversity of who is Indigenous, and the structural forces that impact their experiences. Gendered violence was and continues to be part of the ongoing colonial project, and reconciliation is not possible if it remains at the individual level and does not acknowledge and challenge structural inequalities. As noted by Karina Czyzewski (2011) “reconciliation will only be possible, then, if racism is recognized as structural, pervasive and on-going; but is also addressed as impactful, and inherently linked to other forms of discrimination, like sexism”(7).

As this applies to our research, an Indigenous intersectional framework and the interviews will provide an opportunity for an open exchange, listening and sharing, regarding social work and the field education program past and present, and within the diversity of experiences. As described by Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2003) “we have to understand people within the multiplicity of frames that shape their lives - everyday frames of experience that they choose, that they inherit, that are imposed on them and that may be transformed, disintegrated, forgotten or ritualized” (p. 41). However, as critics of reconciliation processes have pointed out, storytelling in of itself will not lead to transformation, and instead “will demand an ethical listening and reading, and will necessitate follow-up discourses and activities in order to produce social change” (Czyzewski, K. 2011:6). Acknowledging requires us to affirm and learn from the past, hear from students and others what needs to be changed within the field education programming, and embrace new possibilities as offered by the research. This research is an active process of relating to hearing the information that is shared from the students and research participants and finding out what is working and what is not working for them within

their field education programming and placements. The experiences and information from participants will assist us in a process finding out what we can do to address the issues that Indigenous students have identified as not meeting their needs within their field education programming. Restoring is fundamental in not only addressing the problems of the past, but also creating a better path for the future of field education. It is through relating with the Indigenous students, non-Indigenous students, field education coordinators, faculty, and agency field instructors that we can begin an ongoing process of relating with one another to collaboratively work together to build on the current strengths of practicum programming, implement the recommendations, and monitor changes that are needed within field education programming within their respected settings.

This could mean that there is an ongoing field education evaluation process and dialogue put in place, as it pertains to Indigenous students, ensuring that the field education policies, practicum courses, and field placements are fulfilling the guiding values of the project which will better ensure a respectful and meaningful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working in the various levels of the field education programming. This process brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people involved in the field education programming to create a structure based on respect, understanding, guiding values, vision. This process would recognize and honour Indigenous cultural knowledge, experiences and practices as being integral, critical and the most respectful for field education policies and practices. The final step of relating will emerge when social work recognizes that Indigenous peoples are in the best position to make decisions about Indigenous peoples and define their cultural identities. Reconciliation processes can assist social work education programming to move forward in a more respectful way to achieve better experiences, and outcomes for Indigenous students within field education programs, in Canada and in India. While this seems like a grand last step to be taken by the profession as a whole, we regard this research as a ripple on this wave of change. Recognition of Indigenous rights and a commitment to sovereignty is essential in any truth and reconciliation process. Too often, research and policy changes with respect to Aboriginal students are framed within a language of needs, not rights. The UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples during its 62nd session at UN Headquarters

in New York City on 13 September 2007. The Declaration sets out the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples, as well as their rights to culture, identity, language, employment, health, education and other issues. It also “emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.” It “prohibits discrimination against indigenous peoples”, and it “promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them and their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own visions of economic and social development.” Speaking on behalf of India who supported the declaration, Ajai Malhotra said “his country had consistently favoured the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples’ rights. While the Declaration did not define what constituted indigenous peoples, the issue of indigenous rights pertained to peoples in independent countries who were regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region which the country belonged, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present State boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retained some or all of their socio-economic, cultural and political institutions.” (<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/ga10612.doc.htm>). In contrast, Canada did not officially endorse the declaration until November 12th, 2010 (Green, 2011).

Recognizing the principles of the U.N. Declaration in our field education programs would mean beginning to see the centering of Indigenous knowledges within social work and human service field education as a right, not a need. Needs are individual, whereas the process of reconciliation and recognition of rights is a collective response that recognizes nation-to-nation status. The implications of the Declaration, and the policy statements and accreditation standards within social work education, require our research project to consider the rights of Aboriginal students with respect to field education and providing the opportunity for Aboriginal communities to participate in their evaluation and contribute to recommendations and changes required.

The final and important step is action and activism related to the findings from the project. Critics of reconciliation have pointed out that without change at the structural level, that the process of reconciliation

can serve to further re-inscribe power relationships (Angel, 2009). As Taiaiake Alfred (2009) reminds us "Indigenous-settler relations cannot be obviously reconciled without deconstructing the institutions that were built on racism and colonial exploitation" (p. 168). In our project, we wish to attend to the process of truth and reconciliation, but within a framework of intersectionality that attends to power as it operates at the structural level, and that attends to our commitment to social justice, action and activism.

This research may reveal that further research and evaluation need to be done within our social work programs more broadly to meet the needs of Indigenous students and ensure accountability back to Indigenous communities. Sites of activism include structural factors such as policies, the International Association of Schools of Social Work, and the national accreditation standards of that relate to Aboriginal students and communities that are affiliated with the respective social work or human service programs. Participation in areas regarding program design and implementation is only a temporary gain. Aboriginal peoples must also be allowed to participate in the accreditation process in social work education (Moore, 2009, p. 67).

The social work profession has continued to embody predominantly culturally dominant Eurocentric mainstream systems, policies and practices, and yet social work has often deemed itself culturally neutral within its laws and practices (Baikie, 2009; Blackstock, 2005). Regardless of the claims of social work educators and programs, we need to take a closer examination of what guidelines, policy and practice standards are being used, and how they are being monitored to ensure that our social work and field education programs are not only culturally appropriate but also safe for students. Although we have an accreditation body that oversees schools of social work in Canada, it is important to explore the experiences of students and analyze our respective program policies and practices generally and in relation to field education placements. This project will examine the policies within field education accreditation. Some examples of the relevant standards that apply to Indigenous field education and this research include the CASWE Educational Policy standards (8.1 & 8.2), which state that where appropriate, schools' education programmes, including admissions, shall respond to the needs of aboriginal students and their communities; and Aboriginal communities affected by the

programme shall have an opportunity to participate in the planning and ongoing evaluation of the programme.

(Retrieved from: <http://www.casweacfts.ca/vm/newvisual/attachments/866/Media/Standards of Accreditation May 2008 25012010sl.pdf>)

This research and reconciliation process can better ensure that schools are being accountable to Indigenous students and communities within the field education programming by finding out what the needs are, implementing them and monitoring them.

Conclusion

If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (Wilson, 2008, p. 135).

Coming back to our journey together, through the story from our Elder, we consider how this research might change social work and human service education – and ultimately us. Taking time to reflect on our history, and where we are now, will guide us in our journey forward, looking in one direction. Further, the challenge and the opportunity put forward by the Truth and Reconciliation process requires small discussions to begin and for structures and programs across Canada to take responsibility to initiate discussions and dialogue. An Indigenous intersectional framework for truth and reconciliation allows us to not only remain strongly committed to social justice and activism, but also to recognize that we have to work on this issue differently, recognizing that we cannot separate out colonization from gender and other factors (Smith, 2006). We are committed to the process of respectful and inclusive relationships within the research, but also within our classrooms, our field education programs and within ourselves ultimately. As we move forward into year two of this project and begin listening to the stories of our students, educators, community partners, and Elders about their experiences, it will be up to us all to make change. Blackstock (2009) states:

It is not enough to issue a statement on Aboriginal peoples from time to time or tinker with services if what social workers really want are justice, respect and equality for Aboriginal people. We must courageously

redefine the profession [of social work] using reconciliation processes and then move outwards to expand the movement into society (p. 35).

Through this research project, and an Indigenous intersectional framework we are going to start this process and dialogue within specific social work and human service sites within the field education programs.

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